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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether a sample of community college students revealed different amounts of communication apprehension (reticence or anxiety experienced during spoken communication) than four-year college students and university students. Seventy John Wood Community College students, selected at random from among those pre-enrolled for the winter 1978 term, completed the twenty-item McCroskey Personal Report of Communication Apprehension--College instrument. Results showed that there was a significant difference in communication apprehension experienced by community college as opposed to four-year college students; the survey population exhibited higher levels of communication reticence when compared with national norms. The question of why community college students experienced more apprehension requires additional investigation. However, in light of studies indicating that the apprehensive student is less likely to participate in classroom discussion or receive high grades in classes requiring such interaction, the higher-than-average reticence scores also suggest that communication apprehension measures may be a successful predictor of academic success among community college students. (TR)

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A Report
Submitted to the JWCC
Institutional Research Task Force

by

Dan Hayes

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Rationale

Within recent years, a variable discovered to affect academic performance among college students has been labeled "communication apprehension." Briefly, communication apprehension refers to the reticence or anxiety experienced by some individuals prior to and/or during spoken communication.¹ Some college students, for instance, report abnormally high anxiety during spoken communication that occurs in one-to-one, small group, public speaking, and classroom situations.²

The effects of severe communication apprehension extend beyond communication ineffectiveness into the realm of academic performance. One investigation of the academic achievement of four-year college students, for example, revealed that students who were treated for reticence subsequently showed significant improvements in college grade point averages, whereas a group of apprehensive students who went untreated showed no increase in GPA.³ In addition, there is some documentation for the claim that four-year college students who suffer from communication apprehension reveal lower academic achievement. One study indicated that students high in communication

apprehension had significantly lower academic achievement (measured by GPA) in courses involving teacher-student and student-student interaction, although the relationship between apprehension and academic success did not exist in those courses taught by television or mass lectures (limited teacher-student interaction).⁴

Unfortunately, virtually all speech communication apprehension research has involved the traditional four-year college student. There is at present no basis to conclude that community college students exhibit higher, lower, or similar amounts of communication apprehension when compared with the average among four-year college students. Nor is there currently any basis for believing that communication apprehension and academic performance are related at the community college level. Therefore, as a preliminary step toward investigating the role of communication apprehension in the academic performance of community college students, the purpose of this investigation was to determine whether a sample of community college students revealed different amounts of communication apprehension than are indicated by four-year college and university students.

Methods

Seventy JWCC students who attend Quincy College through the contractual arrangement served as subjects of the investigation (N=70). The subjects were selected at random from a group of students who pre-enrolled for the Winter, 1978, term. Subjects were asked to complete the McCroskey Personal Report of Communication Apprehension--College.⁵

The PRCA--College is a twenty-item, self-report inventory designed to measure the amount of communication apprehension

experienced by an individual. It has been used frequently in order to screen college students for research on the reduction and treatment of communication apprehension.⁶ McCroskey reported that the instrument was not only unidimensional, but reliable as well; after administration to 1400 Michigan State University students, internal reliability estimates for the measure averaged .94, and test-retest reliability over a ten-day period was reported at .84. The PRCA--College is very easily scored. Subjects agree or disagree with each of twenty statements, and answers to each statement are scored 1 through 5 (1=low apprehension, 5=high apprehension). The range of possible scores therefore extends from 20 (low apprehension) to 100 (high apprehension). The hypothetical average score on the PRCA--College is 60, and the average has been confirmed on the basis of administering the instrument to 1400 Michigan State University and 2400 Illinois State University students.⁷

After JWCC subjects completed the measure, instruments were scored and the sample mean and standard deviation were found. A *t* test was used to determine if JWCC student scores differed significantly from the constant of 60.45 (the mean score on the PRCA--College as estimated from four-year college student scores).⁸ Since there was no theoretical basis for hypothesizing that the community college students would score higher or lower than four-year college students, a two-tailed statistical test was employed. The .05 level was used to determine whether the mean among JWCC students was significantly different from the constant.

Results

Table one presents the results of the investigation. Column one includes the national norm figures for four-year college student

scores on the PRCA--College. Column two includes the mean and standard deviation among the JWCC student sample. The t value indicates that the difference is significant beyond the .05 level; the community college students that were sampled revealed significantly more communication apprehension than do four-year college students.

TABLE 1

	National Norms	JWCC Scores	t
Mean	60.45	63.858	2.38*
Standard Deviation	11.58	11.845	

*sig. at .05; df=69

Discussion and Conclusion

Results of the investigation suggest that there is a significant difference in the amount of communication apprehension experienced by community college and four-year college students; the community college students exhibited significantly higher levels of communication reticence and anxiety when compared with national norms. The reasons for the difference remain speculative, however, and additional investigations might be undertaken to determine why community college students experience more apprehension than other students.

Previous studies concerned with communication apprehension among four-year students indicated that the highly apprehensive individual is less likely to participate in classroom discussions and interactions. Moreover, the communication apprehensive is less likely to receive high grades in those classes where students have an opportunity or are expected to interact with each other and/or the instructor. Whether or not the results of previous investiga-

tions involved with the relationship between communication apprehension and academic performance apply to the population of community college students remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, the higher-than-average communication reticence scores of the JWCC subjects suggest the possibility that an excellent potential predictor of academic success among community college students has yet to be explored.

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FOOTNOTES

¹See Theodore Clevenger, Jr., "A Synthesis of Experimental Research in Stage Fright," Quarterly Journal of Speech 45 (April 1959): 134-145; Larry A. Steward, "Attitudes Toward Communication: The Content Analysis of Interviews with Eight Reticent and Eight Non-Reticent College Students" (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1969); and Ad Hoc Committee on Evaluation, Speech Communication Association, "Research Notes," Spectra 5 (December 1969): 3.

²See Howard Gilkinson, "A Questionnaire Study of the Causes of Social Fears Among College Speech Students," Speech Monographs 10 (1943): 74-83; Elwood Murray, "A Study of Factors Contributing to the Mal-Development of the Speech Personality," Speech Monographs 3 (1936): 95-108; and James C. McCroskey, "Measures of Communication-Bound Anxiety," Speech Monographs 37 (1970): 269-277.

³Gordon L. Paul and Donald T. Shannon, "Treatment of Anxiety Through Systematic Desensitization in Therapy groups," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 71 (1966): 124-135.

⁴James C. McCroskey and Janis F. Andersen, "The Relationship Between Communication Apprehension and Academic Achievement Among College Students," paper presented to the International Communication Association Convention, 1976.

⁵McCroskey, "Measures. . .Anxiety."

⁶McCroskey, "Measures. . .Anxiety."

⁷McCroskey, "Measures. . .Anxiety."

⁸For a description of this form of the t test, see Merle W. Tate, Statistics in Education and Psychology: A First Course (London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1965), pp. 279-280.